

THE PRODUCTION OF ANTI SOCIAL ACTS UNDER HYPNOSIS

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In his 1941 review of experimental hypnotism, P. C. Young (10) does not find the results of studies on the possible antisocial uses of hypnotism to be conclusive one way or the other. Rowland (6), Wells (9), Brenman (3), and Watkins (8), all conclude hypnotism can be used for criminal purposes. Erickson (4), Bramwell (2), Schilder and Kauder (7), Hollander (5), and Hull [as reported by Wells (9)] deny this possibility. Somewhere between these two conclusions are those of Bernheim (1) who believes that 4 to 5 per cent of subjects can be induced to commit acts which they would consider immoral in a normal state.

Of the various reports which have been presented on this topic, the most satisfactory, from an experimental standpoint, have been those of Rowland, Wells, Brenman, Watkins, and Erickson. The present paper will therefore be restricted to a discussion of the results found in these five studies.

There are at least two outstanding facts concerning these investigations: (a) the results and conclusions appear to fall into two distinct and contradictory groups; (b) there does not appear to be any basis for denying the validity of either category. It is the aim of the writer to offer a possible interpretation which makes use of the two sets of results and which, it is believed, resolves the conflict.

If one makes a parallel examination of the five studies just mentioned, some interesting and suggestive differences can be found. Not only do these reports fall into two classes on the basis of the results obtained, but they also are found to fall into these same categories on the basis of two other criteria: (a) the form and contents of the suggestions used and, (b) the interpretation placed by the investigators upon such expressions as "criminal act," and "antisocial act."

With respect to form and contents of the suggestions, the following may in general be stated. In one group (Erickson), with a few rare exceptions, suggestions are given in

a direct manner. The act to be performed is outlined, and the subject told to carry it out. With possibly one exception, no illusion is ever suggested concerning either the act itself or the subject's environment.

On the contrary, the second group (Brenman, Wells, Rowland, and Watkins) shows extensive use of suggestions aimed at creating illusions, hallucinations, and paramnesia in regard to both the task and the environment.

Space does not permit a detailed examination of each experiment which has been reported in the literature. However a few points will be mentioned.

For instance, Watkins (8) reports success in attempting to induce subjects to attack others with intent to kill, or at least to cause bodily harm. To obtain this result, he suggested to the subjects, all enlisted men, that the victim was an enemy, a "dirty Jap." It was further added that this enemy was about to kill the subject unless the latter killed him first.

Wells (9) and Brenman (3) were able to induce subjects to steal a dollar from Professor Wells' coat. In order to do this, they suggested to the subject that he would *see* the coat and dollar bill as *his*. In fact, they went to much trouble to produce a complex paramnesia concerning the coat and money.

In contrast with this, Erickson (4), in a somewhat similar experiment, merely told his subject to take money from his roommate. He reported failure.

In one experiment, Erickson (4) asked a female subject to examine another person's purse. Here too he failed in obtaining a response. On the other hand, Brenman (3), giving the subject the specific suggestion to *see* the purse as *hers*, succeeded in an otherwise similar experiment.

Lastly, Erickson (4), making a direct demand under hypnosis, failed to elicit the name of a girl in whom his subject, a young man, was interested. Brenman (3), using a girl for subject, obtained material pertaining to a young man of interest to the subject. In con-

trast to Erickson, Brenman used an indirect approach. She suggested the subject had retired to bed, was alone, and was having fantasies which she would describe. It is to be especially noted that Brenman *did not specify* the contents of the reverie.

The same sort of situation, although not always as clear, can be shown to exist for nearly all of the remaining experiments reported, but not discussed here. By itself, it makes it somewhat questionable whether one may consider the two groups of experiments as comparable, that is, equivalent. This last seems to be a valid criticism of Brenman's (3) paper, which aims at disproving the results and conclusions offered by Erickson (4). However, in all fairness, it must be pointed out that a similar criticism holds against any attempts which might be made to use these last-mentioned results to invalidate the conclusions drawn by the first group.

The difference in approach to the subject matter and in the conclusions reached by the two groups seems to the writer to be largely the outcome of the interpretation placed by the investigators upon the expression "anti-social." For instance, it is clear from Brenman's (3) report that, for her, there is criminality in any situation for which a court of law would make the pronouncement of "guilty." With the exception of Erickson (4), this also appears to be true for the other reports. That is, in all of these, an act is labeled "antisocial" by an observer who, presumably, is guided by the purely judicial aspect of the situation *as he sees it*. Nothing is said of the subject's viewpoint. In contrast, Erickson (4) places emphasis upon setting up an experimental situation in which the anti-social act can become an accomplished fact for the subject and in such a way that the latter cannot help but be aware of its anti-social nature.

It appears to be generally agreed among investigators that a hypnotized subject can be induced to commit a criminal act if (a) he feels protected, (b) he has latent criminal tendencies, or (c) through his trust in the hypnotist.

There seems to the writer to be a fourth possible situation in which this may happen. It is when the subject *does not perceive* the

situation as being antisocial. This statement may appear trite to some, yet it is the one factor or situation which can account for the two groups of results.

Let us consider, for instance, Watkins' (8) report. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, one can presume that the subjects perceived the situation *as suggested*. They saw a Japanese soldier ready to attack them. From their standpoint the subsequent responses were not only justified, but even commendable as being in the line of duty.

Again, in Wells' (9) and Brenman's (3) experiments, if the suggestions were really effective, one may presume the subject perceived himself as taking *his own* money from *his own* coat. From his point of view such an act has nothing antisocial about it. A similar remark may be made for the purse experiment as done by Brenman (3).

In brief, in these experiments the suggestions were such as to make the situation *acceptable* to the subject, and, in any event, to make him perceive the situation in a manner different from the one in which he would presumably have perceived it in the normal (waking) state.

On the other hand, in Erickson's version of these experiments there is no evidence to indicate the subject perceived under hypnosis a situation which he would have perceived differently in the normal state.

In either groups of experiments, the results indicate the behavior of the subject was in every instance appropriate to the situation *as defined by the hypnotist*.

As the writer sees it, these two groups of experiments attempt to answer two essentially different questions. Brenman, Wells, Watkins, and Rowland are concerned with the extent to which one may influence a subject's actions by means of illusions and other forms of indirection. In contrast, Erickson appears to deal mainly with the question of free will. That is, the extent to which one can interfere with the subject's capacity to respond to a situation in accordance with whatever system of values he may possess at the time.

If the above analysis is correct, it indicates the importance of making a distinction between the normal (waking) and the hypnotic

situation; between what is defined by the hypnotist for the subject and what is defined by the subject alone. Without this in mind, the results can indeed be expected to be contradictory. On the other hand, in terms of it, it appears possible at this stage to draw fairly definite conclusions. Namely, the behavior of the hypnotized individual seems to be entirely a function of the stimulus-pattern as perceived by him under hypnosis. If the situation appears socially, or in any other ways, acceptable to the subject, he probably can be induced to commit "anti-social" acts. If he perceives the situation as contrary to his own ethical system, it is very unlikely that he can be made to carry out "criminal" acts.

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